
Collective Effort: The American Union and the American Public Library

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ABSTRACT

Unions are a significant element in the library work place, yet there is little discussion of their significance or impact. This article investigates the structures of the unions within the public library in the United States, highlighting the complexity of composition, variance of relationships to library administration, and the simplicity of mission of the union leadership. Results of a brief survey enabled researchers to engage four union officers on areas of significance to them. While concerns over salaries and funding continuity generate concern, discussion also engaged on the perceived value of the professional librarian within public libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Those who make the most use of libraries—children, students, foreign-born, unemployed with much time on their hands, and the many people who want to read but who cannot afford to buy books—these people have little to say about the control of libraries, about what books shall be bought and what kinds of service the library should offer. Until the readers become more articulate in expressing their wants to library boards and city officials, the library workers must plead the case of the readers as well as their own case as workers. (Mary A. Anderson, Director, Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, January, 1938)

The American public library is, first and foremost, a local institution. Established and supported by local funds, staffed by local residents, governed by a locally appointed board, it recycles the character of the local community it serves and, occasionally, enlarges and expands it. While there are regional, state-based and federal organizations of which the

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single public library is a member, it retains a strong local identity. The public employee union is similar: while there are national, statewide, and divisional associations, the “local” functions primarily within a particularly immediate geography. Unlike the public library, however, which networks both horizontally and vertically within a community, unions remain generally self-contained. This commitment ensures a focus on the primary role of a union in a public library: to advocate for the rights, benefits, and safety of the public library employee. As in 1938, the economic conditions of the country, reinforcing the impacts of emerging technologies, have created a range of challenges to the role of the public library, and the public library employee. The perceptions of the union leadership are important, but under-studied, perspectives on the management of current change. The local nature of public employee unions, as well as their self-protective strategies, create difficulties in identifying and contacting public library leadership, but, working with those resources currently available through various websites, this project attempted to identify key themes that would be significant in a formal assessment of the role of the public library unions in the service strategies of the public library as a whole. To that end, this preliminary investigation focused on four broad themes:

- Relationship between unions and community
- Relationship between unions and administration (as exemplified by organizational structures)
- Relationship between MLS and non-MLS positions and union positions
- Unions and the response to the current economic crisis

In order to position those concerns, this article will address the historic and current role of the public employee/library union, its relationship to public library governance and policy, the strength of unions within practice, and its relevance to the development of the public librarian.

UNION STRUCTURES, HISTORY, AND ACTIVITIES

White Collar Identity

White collar workers did not move easily into the labor family. The tensions around labor organizing in libraries were evident in the very earliest efforts. As Milden (1977) explains, the “library spirit,” which he characterized as reflecting the traditional feminine qualities of “service, sacrifice and subordination,” was antithetical to the more assertive worker stance; however, as early as 1917, both the image of worker and altruist vied with an emerging professional identity (p. 153). Maud Malone, the earliest New York Public Library organizer, rejected “the lure of professionalism as elitist” and library labor activists focused on more immediate

concerns such as salary increases, a more equitable promotion system and job security (Shanely, 1995, p. 235). NYPL Local 15590 pushed primarily for the inclusion of employees in the municipal civil service system as the organizers viewed it as the best strategy for combating sexism. While Spero (1948) looked askance at the white collar union member in his notable early study of public employees, during the era of growth for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the late 1930s office workers were viewed as potential allies by the union leadership. Publications by the various unions sought to validate the position of the white collars within the "blue collar" fold; liberal observers hoped the white collar influence would soften some of the blue collar "edge." Today, the public sector unions are stronger than those in the private sector. As Grossfeld (n.d.) relays in his study of attitudes toward unionization:

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that, in 2004, the percentage of workers employed in "professional and related occupations" who are union members was 18.2 percent, compared with the 12.5 percent rate of unionization for all U.S. wage and salary employees. However, unionization among professional employees is largely concentrated in two fields: education, training and library occupations, where the unionization rate is 37.6 percent; and community and social-services occupations, where the unionization rate is 17.4 percent. The next highest rate is 12.6 percent among workers employed in health care practitioner and technical operations. In each of the other professional occupations for which data is collected, the unionization rate was far below that of the U.S. workforce as a whole. (p. 6)

Education, librarianship, social services, and health care are female intensive fields of practice. The Department for Professional Employees (DPE) (2009) reports that "in 2008, women accounted for 83.5% of all librarians, 76% of all other education, training, and library workers and 75% of library technicians" ("Women's work," para. 2). Those working in the largely female "'helping professions,' such as social work, nursing and teaching, view unions more favorably than those working in male-dominated fields, such as chemical engineering and computer science" (Grossfeld, n.d., p. 6). The persistence of the wage differential between the male and female librarian of equal rank has clearly demonstrated that the profession itself will not recognize females as equals in practice (Maatta, 2009). As a result, women have turned to external strategies. Johnson (2002) wrote in *Public Libraries*:

No one says it is easy to reconcile the cultures of unions and public libraries. Libraries have been islands unto themselves, with governing boards that provide limited oversight. This independence, coupled with the notion of library work as "women's work," has allowed library directors in many areas to keep salaries and work benefits for library employees below market value, keep employees part-time with no benefits, move employees from branch to branch at will, and expect

employees to work split shifts at any time on short notice. All of this is usually carried out within a hierarchical administration that asks employees to sacrifice their well-being for the sake of good library service. Paternalism in libraries has persisted since Melvil Dewey convened his first all-female class of librarians. (p. 139)

During the developmental years of the public library, unions social advocacy was very much part of the union mission. Irvine (1976) observed that

during the 1930–1945 period the path of the library union movement bifurcated. One fork evolved in a fashion similar to that of the general American labor movement . . . the other fork evolved in a fashion which may be unique in American labor history, focusing its attention on generating community support for libraries rather than on securing direct economic benefits for its librarian members. (p. 24)

While it is true that library unions engaged progressively on issues of class and race within their communities, their primary focus was always the protection of the value of the work of the employee.

The public library union leadership of today presents the same hierarchy of values: first and foremost, to represent the needs of the workers relative to salary, benefits, and safety and then to “protect the intellectual work of the library” (Michael Wells, personal communication, March 17, 2010). But there is a concern when unions involve themselves beyond the “bread and butter” issues of employees. Unions are not allowed to negotiate on matters of policy, which remain the purview of the library administration. According to Malin (2009), “Where unions gain the right to negotiate issues that significantly affect public policy, they do so by stressing the bread and butter nature of the issue, even though the union’s motivation may be to serve as a voice for the employees in the making of the policy” (p. 1389). Policy issues that may concern public library employees range from public Internet access protocols to employee cell phone use to fine structures.

Relationships to Public Library Governance

Public library administration can experience a range of union relationships. Libraries may have one union, representing all employees or several representing groups of employees, such as professional, clerical, transportation, maintenance. Some unions have a direct relationship with the library administration and bargaining occurs between the representatives of each, while other unions, as part of a larger bargaining unit, will deal with the local government representatives. The Detroit Public Library local negotiates directly with the assistant director for human resources and her staff. The union side is represented by the unit chair (APL Unit, POOL Unit, STU Unit) and the stewards for each unit.

For those libraries where the negotiating authority rests with the

local government agency, the library administration will ordinarily work through a labor/employee relations analyst, who is often a labor lawyer. During contract negotiations, this analyst will anchor the administrative negotiating team, which will commonly include a representative from the library administration, who, despite Johnson's critique of administrative advocacy, is seldom the library director. This creates a distance between the library administration and the employees that may generate misunderstandings of the position of library administration relative to library employee positions.

Contracts can last either a short or long period of time. Between contract negotiations, labor/management meetings are one instrument of communication within functional organizations. Participation in such meetings is intended to be balanced—an equal number of representatives for each interested party—and should be focused on a mutually developed agenda. Many public libraries support regular labor/management meetings, while others rely on the occasional exchange. The focus of such meetings should remain within the scope of the bargaining agreement and should remain between the library administration and union officers.

However, the protection of professional standards has emerged recently as a major concern for library unions. The San Francisco Public Library SEIU Local 1021 recently challenged an administrative plan to schedule "librarians and technicians at the reference desk in the main library." The union argued that it changed the standard of work for the title of "Librarian" and required technicians to work out of class. The union was further concerned when it perceived the library administration as enlisting the support of the American Library Association president to present the administrative agenda for the de-professionalization of public services at a staff meeting (C. Bremer, personal communication, March 17, 2010).

Collective Bargaining

The primary vehicle for union advocacy on behalf of the public employee is the contract negotiation process, also known as collective bargaining. The 1935 National Labor Relations Act established the legality of unions in the private sector. While some governmental employees organized during this same period, the "Age of the CIO" (Latham, 2007), the real growth of public employee unions occurred when President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10988 in 1962, which allowed federal employees to organize for the purpose of negotiation (Bahrami, Bitzan, & Leitch, 2009, p. 36). Many local and state governments soon followed, although a large number remained "right to work" states, primarily in the southeast of the United States. Congress eventually revised federal practice via the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978.

There is a close relationship between civil service practice and the activities of public employee unions. Civil service law, an import of British

practice, was first passed in 1872, and then revised with the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act in 1883. The Act established the U.S. Civil Service Commission, which moved federal appointments out of the political spoils system and into a merit-based system. States also created civil service commissions, and civil service offices currently function in regional divisions of the various states. Because the public library is funded as a quasi-governmental organization, the selection and appointment of public library employees is commonly managed via the civil service system. Public library unions align with the civil service structure to maintain the merit-based approach and to protect seniority, ensuring that the system is equitably and consistently applied to all members who work in the competitive class. The relationship between civil service and unions dates back to the era of the Great Depression, when the public sector unions emerged in the face of governmental disregard of civil service structures (Latham, 2008, p. 21).

Public library administrative positions are classified as exempt civil service positions, which, because they are part of management, are not allowed union membership. While administrators compete for appointments via the civil service structure, they are accountable to the public library director, who reports to a governing board. Library board members may be elected but are most commonly appointed by the local government executive; they in turn most commonly select the public library director, ideally to protect the library leadership from political manipulation.

Size of Membership

The AFL-CIO Department for Professional Employees (DPE) (2010) reports that professional workers “number 25.5 million and account for 35.5% of all white collar workers and 20.3% of the work force;” before the impact of the investment crisis employment of professional and related workers was projected to “increase by more than six million, or 21.2%” (para. 2). While those estimates are certainly more constrained given the current economy the professional presence within workers unions is a strong presence. The DPE “is a coalition of 24 national unions representing over four million professional and technical employees. DPE unions represent professionals in over three hundred occupations in many sectors” (para. 1). Affiliates include such organizations as the Actor’s Equity Association, United Steel Workers, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, along with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, among the many listed.

As library employees fall within the class of professional employees, the DPE has also worked with the American Library Association–Allied Professional Association: the organization for the advancement of library employees (ALA-APA) to analyze recent salary trends within the library field. ALA-APA was established by the ALA Council in 2001, to assist with

knowledge development beyond the initial degree. In January 2002, the scope of the organization was broadened to include advocacy for the “mutual professional interests of librarians and other library workers” (ALA-APA, 2010). The 2009 “Fact Sheet” indicates that, in 2008, there were “197,000 librarians, 44,000 library technicians, and 101,000 other education, training and library workers.” (DPE, 2009, “The numbers,” para. 1). About one-fourth of the professional librarians work in public libraries. In results consistent with those of Grossfeld (n.d.), the DPE (2009) found that in 2008, “workers in education, training, and library occupations had the highest unionization rates for any occupation group. Nearly 39% of workers in this occupation group were members of a union. In 2008, 25.8% of librarians were union members; 30.2% were represented by unions. Among library technicians, 19.4% were union members in 2008, and 20.8% were represented by unions” (DPE, 2009, “The union difference,” para. 1).

Affiliations

Most public library unions belong to one of two larger unions: the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (an AFL-CIO Union with 1.6 million workers) or Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO in 2005 (2.2 million members). The SEIU presents itself as “an organization . . . united by the belief in the dignity and worth of workers and the services they provide and dedicated to improving the lives of workers and their families and creating a more just and humane society” (n.d.). Independent unions include United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) as well as the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW).

Benefits

“Bread and butter” issues involve primarily salary—wage and hours, which are intertwined—and benefits. As noted earlier, salaries are tied to job descriptions, which are often developed within the civil service system, based on standards applied by the civil service commission officers. The revision of titles within a civil service class can be difficult unless supported by the civil service commission, slowing the ability of libraries to respond to changes within practice. Even so, an American Library Association Support Staff Interests Round Table (ALA SSIRT) survey of 212 library support staff found that 73 percent of support staff are performing tasks previously performed by MLS librarians (DPE, 2009).

Salaries. The *ALA-APA Salary Survey: Librarian-Public and Academic* for 2009, analyzed 2008 data from more than 1,179 public and academic libraries. The results indicated that the mean salary for librarians with ALA-accredited master’s degrees (which were reported) “decreased less than 1 percent from 2008, down \$100 to \$58,860. The median ALA MLS salary

was \$54,500, 2 percent higher than in 2008, and salaries ranged from \$22,000 to \$256,800" (American Library Association, 2009). This is above the minimum salary of \$40,000 recommended for professional librarians by the ALA-APA in January, 2008 (now adjusted to \$42,181).

Salary is a critical issue for the ALA-APA. The impact of unionization is reported as positive: union librarians earned an average of 29 percent more than non-union librarians in 2008. Union library technicians earned an average of 40 percent more than their non-union colleagues during the same period (DPE, 2009). The joint research of the ALA-APA and the DPE indicate that unionization is positive in all areas of the country, except the southeast, which is a right to work region. The difference ranges from a positive impact of 17 percent to a higher impact of 24 percent. Bahrami, Bitzan, & Leitch (2009) noted that "until recently, disproportionately less attention has been paid to the union wage effect in the public sector than that in the private sector. . . . [The] growing importance of the public sector in terms of union membership suggests that a more complete understanding of the role of unions in wage determination requires a better understanding of their role in the public sector" (p. 35). Cole (2006) proposed a perspective on the effectiveness of unions in the public sector. He explains that it relates to sources of power: while recourse to the strike is limited or nonexistent for public employees, in the public sector (as opposed to the private) "employees vote for the legislative and executive officials they ultimately bargain with" (p. 333). When a local government election can be decided by as little as twenty-one votes, the relationship with the public employee union can be critical to a local government official (Mariani, 2007).

Health care. Health care is a critical negotiating point in the collective bargaining process. The nation witnessed the priority of health care to union leadership when the Obama administration attempted to tie a tax to health care benefits (MacGillis, 2010). "Union workers are much more likely to have employment-based health benefits than nonunion workers. In September 2007, 82.7 percent of union workers were covered by health benefits through their own job, compared with 58.2 percent of nonunion workers. Overall, 94.2 percent of union workers had employment-based health benefits, compared with 76.4 percent of nonunion workers" (Fronstin, 2005, p. 3). Having bargained away wage benefits in the past to protect medical coverage, unions were adamant about maintaining the value of the insurance they had attained.

Safety. Safety is another issue significant to library workers and the unions that represent them. Concern over erratic patrons, sex offenders in the library building, and the security of personal items in the workplace are issues that can emerge in labor/management discussions.

Collective Pressure. Public employees are generally not allowed to strike, or may only strike within certain parameters. This has not prevented a history of strike activity from developing around libraries (Chronology of

job actions, 1976), most recently the Canadian Union Public Employee (CUPE) eighty-eight day strike in Vancouver in 2007, which resulted in a commitment to pay equity. However, workers may picket on their own time, may participate in organizing drives on their own time and may bring concerns to library administration through petition. Members of the Los Angeles AFSCME local, for instance, picketed the mayor's residence during his "pre-Oscar" party. The "save the library" campaign generated weekly visits to Los Angeles city council members with another twenty-four union members addressing the council in session (R. Stone, personal communication, March 17, 2010).

THE COLLECTIVE EFFORT PROJECT

Research on Library Unions

As Kearney (2010) observes, "It is a longstanding irony that despite the relative strength of unionization and collective bargaining in the public sector, scholarly research has lagged significantly behind the copious quantity of published research on unions in the private sector" (p. 1). That critique applies to scholarly research on libraries as a whole, and public libraries specifically. Despite the ubiquity of these organizations, they attract little structured investigation. The Progressive Librarians Guild incorporates union activity into its field of study. The journal *Progressive Librarian* has reported regularly on union related activities; Kathleen de la Peña McCook has collected and organized information related to library unions since issue twenty-eight, when the journal published her first "There Is Power in a Union" review article (de la Peña McCook, 2008, 2009, 2010). The *Progressive Librarian* also included a report on the strike activities of the Vancouver Public Library Local 391 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) (Galanapoulos et al., 2008). Schmidle (2002) edited an issue of *Library Trends* that investigated services developed for and delivered to the broader labor community.

In one significant report from 2009, Rachel Applegate explored whether unionization in U.S. academic libraries provides any quantitative benefits (p. 444). According to Applegate, the "[p]revious literature on unions and academic libraries has consisted more of anecdotes than systematic data. What data have been reported have been limited and contradictory" (p. 444). In total, Applegate analyzed data from 1,904 accredited U.S. colleges and universities. She explored three basic questions relative to unionization: (1) Did users benefit from the unionization of academic libraries?; (2) Did the library benefit from unionization?; (3) Did library staff benefit from unionization? She concludes that "unionization is best for librarians," if not necessarily for the academic library, and calls for further research in the area of unionization in libraries (Applegate, p. 461). Her research provides "some, but very limited, answers in the unionization area" (Applegate, p. 461).

Latham (2007) has researched the history of public library unions, situating them within the emergence of the then radical Congress of Industrial Organizations in the 1930s, which established a clear relationship between progressive policies within public libraries and the presence of unions. Other historic studies include Berelson's classic 1939 study of the launch of public library unions, Clopine's timely dissertation on the state of library unions in 1951, Biblo's investigation of "Employee Organization and Collective Bargaining in Libraries," (1976), Mildren's (1977) and Shanley's (1995) studies of the first New York Public Library union and Flexman's 1991 report on the relationship between library unions and the public sector. Guyton (1975) produced an early study of librarians' views on unionization within the profession, but the bulk of the research into the role of contemporary unions emerges from the advocacy organizations' investigations of their own effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

This research project identified potential public library unions from a list developed by Kathleen de la Peña McCook, now included in the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, 3rd edition (2010). Forty public library unions were contacted via e-mail (see appendix A: Initial E-mail) and telephone calls for participation in this project. However contact with public library unions proved to be difficult; the requests generated a total of nine responses. The data set includes both the results of an online survey and the information obtained from the interviews of four public library union presidents. The selection of telephone interviews was done using a "purposeful selection" methodology for "information-rich cases" as described by Patton (as cited in Lindloff, 1995, p. 126).

The set of research questions was developed in consultation with Caron Chapman, president of Local 2864 (Professional Librarians) of the AFSCME Council 5 representing Hennepin County, MN, Dr. Kathleen de la Peña McCook, of the University of South Florida, and Mary Knapp, president of Local 60 of AFSCME Wisconsin Council 40. Three invitations to participate in the survey were sent out to public library unions, the first on February 8, 2010 (see appendix B: First Online Survey Invitation); the second on February 23, 2010; and the third and final invitation was sent out March 1, 2010 (see appendix C: Second and Third Online Survey Invitation). The critical question of our research project was "Is the union committed to the public library as a community service institution?" Subsequent research questions were designed to explore the critical research question, but also to elicit interpretations of the current environment and issues that public library unions encounter. The results of the online survey were successful in identifying the environment and current issues, but did not adequately answer the critical research question with any depth.

In order to achieve the depth and richness of information the project

team chose a "narrative interview" method as described by Lindloff (1995, pp. 172–174). The interviews were conducted over several days on the telephone with the researchers each taking notes of key themes and responses to the interview questions. The information provided via the on-line survey was used to instigate the interview process, yet the interviewee was free to steer the interview. Permitting the interviewee to steer the interview is an important method for discovering the perspective of the interviewee and how the interviewee constructs that perspective (Spradley, 1979, p. 34). This method permitted the discovery of three main themes: protection of the profession against non-MLS employees, but acknowledgement of the value those employees add to the library; a lack of direct contact between library governance and the union(s), except for labor management meetings; the commitment of the union presidents to the public library as a vital part of a vibrant community.

Survey Information

Of the twenty-six questions posed on the survey instrument, six involved basic information such as membership within the union, parent organizations, willingness to participate in a telephone interview, as well as contact information. The other twenty queries attempted to gain insight into the position of the union as it related to collective bargaining within the public library, collective action within the public library, visions of public service roles, and the influence of progressive values.

Collective Bargaining. Eight officers reported two models for contract negotiations: the broader union negotiates with the local government representatives, or the local union delegates negotiate with the library human resources staff. In one instance the union negotiating committee met with the library director, deputy director, and town personnel director. Eight officers addressed the query concerning engagement with the library board, and seven indicated that the board, however structured, had no direct relationship with the union leadership. One reported that the union did attend subcommittee meetings of the library board "when relevant." Three officers reported that the library board served only as advisors to the library director and were not involved in library governance.

Collective Action. Two questions directly related to the union leaderships' relationship to its own membership. Seven officers responded that "fear of backlash" was one of the biggest challenges in organizing library staff, while six indicated that ignorance of the role of the union was also a major element. Another challenge was "justifying union dues." Four of the eight respondents believed that apathy was an issue. One officer indicated that challenges to motivating staff arose from union staff that hate unions and "are very vocal, ignorant and troublesome." Another noted that "there is a sense that the union will take care of everything and no one even needs to attend a meeting." But another noted that lack of access to the press

affected their ability to get their message out, while another observed that public employees are generally under attack for "having unsustainable wages, compensation and retirement benefits." One officer noted that compensation issues will generally generate action, and another noted that since there is so little funding the issues tend to focus on the use of volunteers within the library or staff working out of class.

Public Service. Eight union officers were soundly committed to the library as a public service agency, and believed that the library would continue to function as a viable community agency. One officer noted that, since employees are required to live within the service community, they understand their jobs serve their own families. Another stated that the library provides lifelong learning support and resources and is prepared to "adapt to the needs of the community." Another recognized that "librarians must reinvent themselves" but did not recognize any relationship between the ability to effect that reinvention and the support of the unions for the process.

Progressive Values. One participant stated the values guiding their union quite clearly, "We provide much needed services that are required and necessary [to] help maintain a safe and vibrant community for all ages, genders, [and] ethnicities." Another noted that the unions are often "in the lead when it comes to social issues . . . thus benefitting the entire community, not just their members." The value of promoting services instead of simply offering them was offered by one respondent as a critical concern. Concern over library service in economically challenged communities was also.

Issues. The main issues that emerged in the survey addressed the changes in practice for all staff as influenced by the current economic downturn. Many government officials are threatening or implementing branch library closures, which also affects the need for staff. Protection of the MLS library professional has been the focus of several unions, as well as compensation for those non-MLS staff required to fulfill professional duties. One officer noted that "management is grooming the paraprofessional staff to take over the jobs of those with an MLS." Another observed that "clerical positions have become more generalists, and have been trained and assigned to provide basic reference and readers advisory assistance to customers." Vacant positions are being abolished and "those with an MLS degree are being laid off . . . being replaced with paraprofessionals (no degree)." Another officer reported that, aside from the cross-assignment of MLS and non-MLS library staff, "We have seen a greater increase and reliance on part-time benefitted and un-benefitted staff to meet the demands of the public by being open more hours. Quantity is emphasized over quality."

Union President Interviews

The interviews with four public library union presidents revealed the centrality of the current economic situation. Budget cuts were driving changes that had been emerging more slowly before the economic crisis. The Detroit Public Library alone was not dealing with significant budget cuts as it is its own incorporated institution with dedicated funding provided by property tax. This change was made in 1985, after, as Michael Wells describes, the first major hit to the Detroit economy, the introduction in the 1970s and 1980s of Japanese made automobiles (M. Wells, personal communication, March 26, 2010). In the 1980s, the Detroit Public Library was in the situation that many public libraries find themselves today, facing steep budget cuts. The Detroit Public Library and the community realized that without dedicated funding for the public library system, the system would be unsustainable in the long-run. Thus, in 1985, the Detroit Public Library moved to a dedicated funding source, property tax, which despite the reduction of property values in the Detroit area has provided a steady income for the past twenty-five years. Recently the UAW LU 2200, which represents the Detroit Public Library workers, was able to secure a 6 percent pay increase for library workers.

However, the Los Angeles Public Library has been forced to cut potentially millions of dollars from its expenses over the next five years and impose smaller salaries on staff. According to union representative Roy Stone, depending on how the proposed cost saving measures for the City of Los Angeles are interpreted, the Los Angeles Public Library could lose two million dollars per year over the next five years, ten million dollars in total, or, in the alternative interpretation, ten million dollars for the five years (R. Stone, personal communication, March 17, 2010). There is a provision in the cost-saving measure that permits for increases over the two million dollars per year cuts to funding. The members of AFSCME Local 2626, which represents the library workers, have made a concerted effort to "save LAPL" (<http://librariansguild.org>). The union's activities include petitioning city government, launching an awareness campaign, and reaching out to the community served by the public libraries. The Los Angeles Public Library does not have a dedicated funding apparatus similar to the Detroit Public Library.

The San Francisco Public Library has recently experienced similar budget cutting measures and a hiring freeze has been in place for a number of years. However the mayor of San Francisco, Gavin Newsom, on March 5, 2010 fired many of the city's employees to rehire them as part-time employees. Cathy Bremer, a steward for SEIU Local 1021, discussed not only the potential impact that fewer working hours can have on the libraries, but also that impact on the lives of librarians, "There are rights granted to full-time employees, which part-time employees do not have. Part-time employees have little say about the work they do or have any

control over their jobs” (C. Bremer, personal communication, April 8, 2010). At this time, the union is investigating how to overcome the part-time designation, which, as Bremer explains, “Creates issues for those employees with loans or employees wishing to seek out loans.” The impact of the part-time designation is greater than the diminishing of working hours and the potential for the City of San Francisco to save money. The San Francisco Public Library does have a set-aside from the property tax fund. However, the change of status was planned regardless of the budget situation in each city department (C. Bremer, personal communication, April 8, 2010).

The Free Library of Philadelphia presents another case where the budget concerns of the city have had an impact on the public library. Despite an increase in sales tax revenue the budget crisis in Philadelphia continues. Currently the mayor is seeking alternate funding for the city to close the revenue gap, but the library is still potentially on the chopping block. Jim Quinn of the AFSCME DC47 said the union “not only represents the workers, but also works to secure the budget of the library” (J. Quinn, personal communication, March 17, 2010). The union membership engages not only in local advocacy, but also lobbies state representatives to ensure maintenance of state-funded services, which Quinn believes are essential to a continuity of service. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees DC 47 works through a coalition of groups, which include literacy and recreational groups, and reflects the Philadelphian emphasis on services at the neighborhood level.

The interviewees clearly indicated that their primary purpose is to work for their members and, simultaneously, advocate for the funding of their public libraries. Dedicated, tax based funding, as experienced by Detroit Public Library, also provides a greater degree of autonomy and a freedom from resource dependency. The importance of the public library in the community requires a reexamination of the current apparatuses for funding our public libraries (see Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Grossfeld (n.d.) wrote that

in an era of economic globalization, unions and the collective bargaining process remain the most effective vehicles for workers to win economic security for themselves and their families. Regardless of how profitable their employers are, workers who are denied the opportunity to negotiate their wages, hours and working conditions lack any significant means to share in the profits they create. This is the case for the 87 percent of U.S. workers who have no union representation. (p. 7)

Similarly, the SEIU declares that the role of the unions is to promote collective bargaining with institutional management or governance on behalf of its members, but they also add “to create a more just and humane

society.” The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) union also positions its workers advocacy within a larger social framework: “While we work for justice in the workplace, we advocate for prosperity and opportunity for all of America’s working families. We not only stand for fairness at the bargaining table—we fight for fairness at the ballot box and in the halls of government” (AFSCME, n.d.).

Chris Maisano of the Brooklyn Public Library wrote in a 2009 blog post, however, that unions face obstacles to their relevance in the broader culture:

Many library union locals are moribund. Members often view the union as external to them, as an insurance scheme that exists only to maintain wages, administer benefits, and handle a grievance here and there. We need to understand that we are the union and that it will only be effective to the degree that we are active and ready to organize ourselves around these issues. Also, decision-making in regard to innovation is usually considered a “management prerogative” that workers cannot bargain over in contract negotiations. This can and must change. The influx of young librarians into the profession can revitalize our union locals. And vibrant, active locals can organize to assert greater worker control over innovation so that management does not use technological innovation as a cover to deskill and deprofessionalize our jobs (and subsequently lower our wages and salaries). (Maisano, 2009)

The four union officers reflected the same concerns expressed by Maisano. Union meetings commonly include eight to ten core members, unless there is a major challenge to the status quo of the organization. Bremer noted the significance of library employees recognizing that “success depends on the perception of ourselves as the union” (C. Bremer, personal communication, March 17, 2010). Given the number of public library employees, and the value of the union as a voting bloc, it is a question for research why even those public libraries dependent on government funding would be at risk as community service agencies.

SUMMARY

The American public library is a complex organization. Legislatively structured to function as an independent information authority within its local community, it is constrained by multiple governmental structures such as politically appointed governing boards, the regional civil service commission, the local government human resources authority, and state requirements for hours of service and staffing, among others. Funding for the library is most often controlled by local legislatures, unless the library has exercised the right to secure an independent funding stream. Threats of cuts to funding can be used to require library directors and library boards to adhere to a legislative and/or executive agenda, despite legal structures to protect the autonomy of the public library.

The public library unions, in partnership with their colleagues, function as a balance to these elitist structures, but only to the extent that the membership participates in the broader agenda. If public libraries are to continue to function as robust information and cultural centers for their communities, it may well require the engagement of the union membership to ensure those functions, not only for themselves but, as Anderson (1938) noted, the good of all.

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APPENDIX A. INITIAL E-MAIL

Greetings,

My name is Wyatt Ditzler. I have been asked by Professor Joyce Latham at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Professor Kathleen de la Peña McCook at the University of South Florida to obtain information about library unions for a research project. Do you have contact information for a local union member/leader that would be knowledgeable of the [Library Name] Union?

Cordially,

Wyatt Ditzler

PhD Student in Information Policy and Ethics

School of Information Studies

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

APPENDIX B. FIRST ONLINE SURVEY INVITATION

Dear Colleagues,

Recently we sent you a request to participate in an important survey concerning public libraries and unions. Please consider adding your perspective to our survey, if you have not done so already.

Below this message is the link to the online survey, which should occupy about 10–15 minutes of your time. The survey has been developed in consultation with public library union presidents in order to ensure that the concerns of union activists are included in the evaluation. The findings will help inform a larger discussion of the library as “work place.” The responses to this survey will be held in confidence unless you agree to be contacted for further discussion of your responses, which is the last question of the survey.

Please do not hesitate to contact me (wditzler@uwm.edu) if you have any access issues, comments, or concerns with the survey. We look forward to all of your responses in what we feel is an important aspect of public librarianship.

Survey URL:

https://milwaukee.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_3kpWH7f8NNZsGVK&SVID=Prod

Cordially,

Wyatt Ditzler

PhD Student in Information Policy

School of Information Studies

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

APPENDIX C. SECOND AND THIRD ONLINE SURVEY INVITATION

Dear Colleagues,

Recently we sent you a request to participate in an important survey concerning public libraries and unions. Please consider adding your perspective to our survey, if you have not done so already.

Below this message is the link to the online survey, which should occupy about 10–15 minutes of your time. The survey has been developed in consultation with public library union presidents in order to ensure that the concerns of union activists are included in the evaluation. The findings will help inform a larger discussion of the library as “work place.” The responses to this survey will be held in confidence unless you agree to be contacted for further discussion of your responses, which is the last question of the survey.

Please do not hesitate to contact me (wditzler@uwm.edu) if you have any access issues, comments, or concerns with the survey. We look forward

to all of your responses in what we feel is an important aspect of public librarianship.

Survey URL:

https://milwaukee.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_3kpWH7f8NNZsGVK&SVID=Prod

Cordially,

Wyatt Ditzler

PhD Student in Information Policy

School of Information Studies

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

APPENDIX D. LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFL: American Federation of Labor

CIO: Committee of Industrial Organizations (historic; Congress of Industrial Organizations)

AFL-CIO: American Federation of Labor—Congress of Industrial Organizations

SEIU: Service Employees International Union

CUPE: Canadian Union of Public Employee

AFSCME: American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

UAW: United Auto Workers